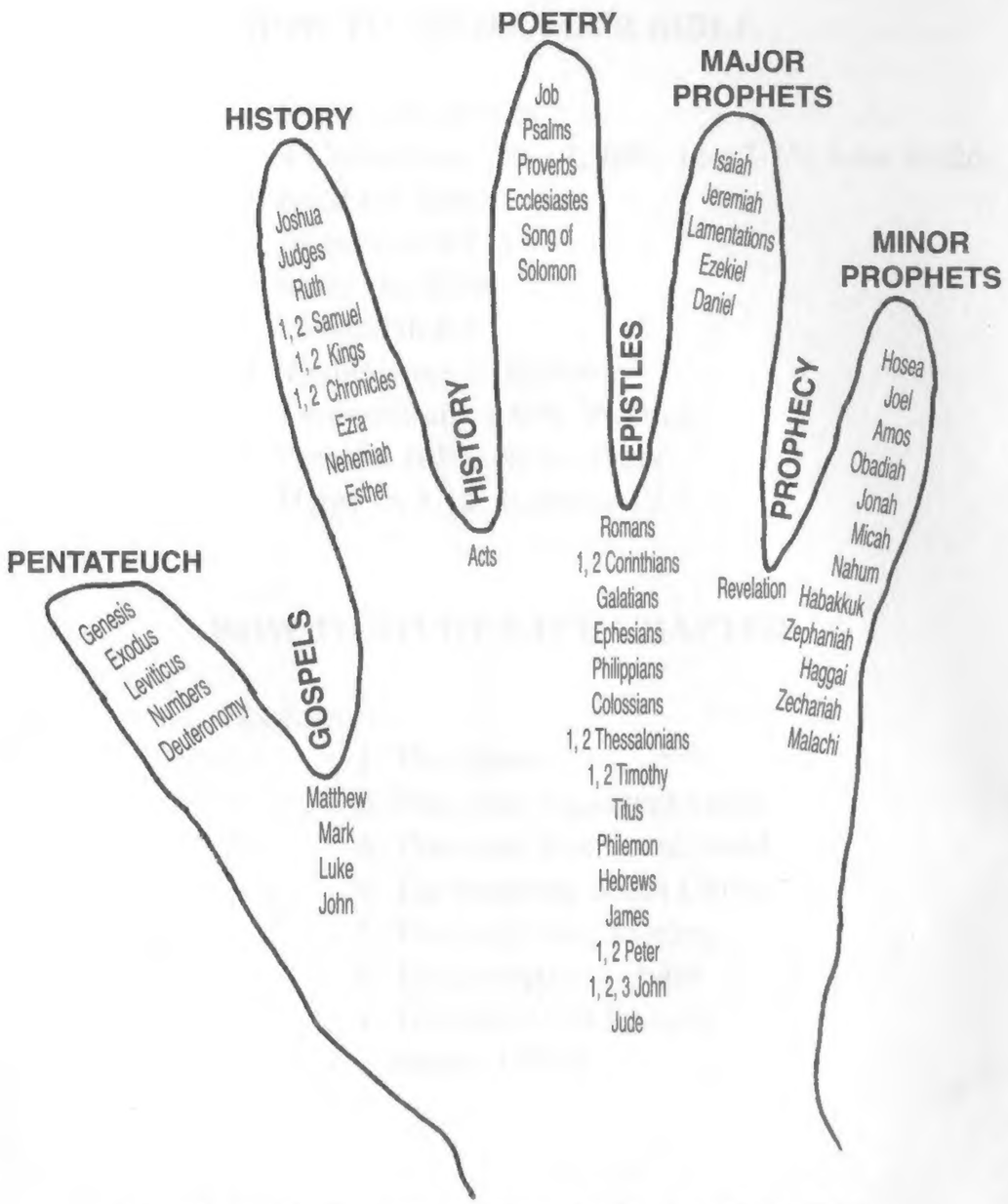

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GUIDELINES FOR THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE SCRIPTURES

Dr. J. Vernon McGee

INTRODUCTION

IS THE BIBLE IMPORTANT?

The Bible is probably the most maligned Book that ever has been written. It has been attacked as no other book has ever been attacked. Yet it has ministered and does minister to literally millions of people around the globe, and it has been doing this now for several thousand years. A Book of this nature and with this tremendous impact upon the human family certainly deserves the intelligent consideration of men and women.

Sir Walter Scott, on his deathbed, asked Lockhart to read to him. Puzzled, as he scanned the shelf of books that Walter Scott had written, he asked, "What book shall I read?" And Sir Walter replied, "Why do you ask that question? There is but one book; bring the Bible." There is only one Book for any man who is dying, but it is also *the* Book for any man who is living. A great many folk do not get interested in the Bible until they get to the end of their lives or until they get into a great deal of difficulty. While it is wonderful to have a Book in which you can find comfort in a time like that, it is also a Book for you to *live*—in the full vigor of life. It is a Book to face life with today, and it's the Book which furnishes the only sure route through this world and on into the next world. It is the only Book that can enable us to meet the emergencies and cushion the shocks that come to us in life. The Bible is different from any other book.

That this Book has influenced great men who, in turn, have influenced the world is evident. Let me share with you some quotations.

There was an African prince who came to England and was presented to Her Majesty Queen Victoria. This prince asked a very significant question, "What is the secret of England's greatness?" The queen got a beautifully bound copy of the Bible and presented it to the prince with this statement: "This is the secret of England's greatness." I wonder, friend, if England's decline to a second-rate and then third-rate nation may be tied up in the fact that England has gotten away from the Word of God.

Gladstone, statesman, prime minister, probably one of the greatest legal minds Britain ever produced, said, "Talk about the questions of the day! There is but one question, and that is the Gospel. That can and will correct everything. I am glad to say that about all the men at the top in Great Britain are Christians." That was way back in the 1800s. Gladstone continued, "I have been in public position fifty-eight years, all but eleven of them in the Cabinet of the British Government, and during those forty-seven years have been associated with sixty of the masterminds of the century, and all but five of the sixty were Christians." I personally think that part of the problems we are having in the world today is that we have too few Christians at the top, too few who are acquainted with the Word of God.

Michael Faraday, perhaps the greatest scientific experimenter back in the 1800s, said, "But why will people go astray, when they have this blessed book of God to guide them?" Sir Isaac Newton, a scientist in the preceding century, said, "If the Bible is true, the time is coming when men shall travel at fifty miles an hour." In response Voltaire, the French skeptic, commented, "Poor Isaac. He was in his dotage when he made that prophecy. It only shows what Bible study will do to an otherwise scientific mind."

It might be interesting to note what some of our early Presidents had to say about the Bible. John Adams, our second President, said, "I have examined all [that is, all of Scripture] as well as my narrow sphere, my straightened means, and my busy life will allow me, and the result is that the Bible is the best book in the world. It contains more of my little philosophy than all the libraries I have seen, and such parts of it I cannot reconcile to my little philosophy I postpone for future investigation." Then President John Quincy Adams said, "I speak as a man of the world to men of the world; and I say to you: search the Scriptures. The Bible is the book above all others to be read at all ages and in all conditions of human life; not to be read once or twice through and then laid aside, but to be read in small portions every day." And the Presidents back in those days, who made our nation great, did not get us into foreign wars and were able to solve the problems of the streets. Someone may counter, "But the problems weren't as complicated then as they are now." They were for that day, friend.

Not only England but also the United States has gotten away from the Word of God. And the farther we get, the more complicated our problems become. Right now there are men and women in positions of authority in this land who are saying that there is no solution

to our problems. That is the reason I am teaching the Word of God in its entirety—I believe it is the only solution. And, frankly, friend, we had better get back to it.

Another President, Thomas Jefferson, said this about the Bible: "I have always said, and always will say, that the studious perusal of the Sacred Volume will make better citizens, better husbands, and better fathers." This is something to think over today when our citizens are burning down the cities in which they live and when divorce is running rife.

It was Daniel Webster who made this statement: "If there be anything in my style or thoughts to be commended, the credit is due to my kind parents for instilling into my mind an early love of the Scriptures." What about you today, Christian parent? Are you making a Daniel Webster in your home or a little rebel? Webster also made this statement: "I have read it [the Bible] through many times. I now make a practice of going through it once a year. It is the Book of all others for lawyers as well as divines. I pity the man who cannot find in it a rich supply of thought and rules for conduct."

THE BOOK OF BOOKS

Born in the East and clothed in Oriental form and imagery, the Bible walks the ways of all the world with familiar feet, and enters land after land to find its own everywhere. It has learned to speak in hundreds of languages to the heart of man. It comes into the palace to tell the monarch that he is a servant of the Most High, and into the cottage to assure the peasant that he is a son of God. Children listen to its stories with wonder and delight, and wise men ponder them as parables of life. It has a word of peace for the time of peril, a word of comfort for the time of calamity, a word of light for the hour of darkness. Its oracles are repeated in the assembly of the people, and its counsels whispered in the ear of the lonely. The wicked and the proud tremble at its warnings, but to the wounded and the penitent it has a mother's voice. The wilderness and the solitary place have been made glad by it, and the fire on the hearth has lit the reading of its well-worn pages. It has woven itself into our dearest dreams; so that love, friendship, sympathy and devotion, memory and hope put on the beautiful garments of its treasured speech, breathing of frankincense and myrrh.

—Henry van Dyke

IN WHAT WAY IS THE BIBLE UNIQUE?

In many ways the Bible is a most unusual Book. For instance, it has a dual authorship. In other words, God is the Author of the Bible, and in another sense man is the author of the Bible. Actually, the Bible was written by about forty authors over a period of approximately 1500 years. Some of these men never even heard of the others, and there was no collusion among the forty. Two or three of them could have gotten together, but the others could not have known each other. And yet they have presented a Book that has the most marvelous continuity of any book that has ever been written. Also, it is without error. Each author expressed his own feelings in his own generation. Each had his limitations and made his mistakes—poor old Moses made mistakes, but when he was writing the Pentateuch, somehow or other no mistakes got in there. You see, it is a human Book and yet it is a God-Book.

It is a very human Book, written by men from all walks of life, prince and pauper, the highly intellectual and the very simple. For example, Dr. Luke writes almost classical Greek in a period when the Koine Greek was popular. His Greek is marvelous! But Simon Peter, the fisherman, wrote some Greek also. His is not so good, but God the Holy Spirit used both of these men. He let them express exactly their thoughts, their feelings, and yet through that method the Spirit of God was able to overrule in such a way that God said exactly what He wanted to say. That's the wonder of the Book, the Bible.

It is a God-Book. In the Bible God says 2500 times, "God said . . . the Lord has said . . . thus saith the Lord," etc. God has made it very clear that He is speaking through this Book. It is a Book that can communicate life to you. You can even become a child of God, begotten "not by corruptible seed, but by incorruptible, by the Word of God that liveth and abideth forever." It is God's communication to man. And if God spoke out of heaven right now, He would just repeat Himself because He has said all that He wants to say to this genera-

tion. And, by the way, He didn't learn anything when He read the morning paper. When man went to the moon, he didn't discover anything that God didn't already know when He gave us the Bible. He is the same God who created this universe that we are in today.

The Bible is both divine and human. In a way it is like my Lord who walked down here and grew weary and sat down at a well. Although He was God, He was man. He talked with people down here and communicated with them. This is a Book that communicates. It speaks to mankind today. The Bible is for men as they are.

> *The Bible is a corridor between two eternities down which walks the Christ of God; His invisible steps echo through the Old Testament, but we meet Him face to face in the throne room of the New; and it is through that Christ alone, crucified for me, that I have found forgiveness for sins and life eternal. The Old Testament is summed up in the word Christ; the New Testament is summed up in the word Jesus; and the summary of the whole Bible is that Jesus is the Christ.*
>
> —Bishop Pollock

HOW DO YOU KNOW THE BIBLE IS FROM GOD?

How do you know the Bible is the Word of God? This is a good question, and it should be asked and answered.

1. Preservation—One of the objective proofs, one of the external proofs, has been the marvelous preservation of the Bible. There was a king of old—we read about him in the Book of Jeremiah—who, when the Word was sent to him, took a penknife and cut it to pieces. But it was rewritten, and we have that Word today. Down through the centuries there have been a great many Bible burnings. Today there's a great deal of antagonism toward the Bible. In our country today it is not being burned because we think that we are too civilized for such behavior. The way they try to get rid of it is just to outlaw it in our schools and in many other places. (Yet we talk about our freedom of religion and freedom of speech.) In spite of all the attacks that have been made upon the Bible, it still today exists, and, of course, it's one of the best sellers. For many years it was *the* best seller, but it's not today. I regret to have to say that, but it is true. And that is certainly a commentary on our contemporary society. It reveals that the Bible is not really occupying the place that it once did in the history and in the life of this nation. Yet, I think the amazing preservation of the Word of God is worthy of consideration.

2. Archaeology—Another way in which we can know the Bible is the Word of God is through archaeology. The spade of the archaeologist has turned up many things that have proven that it is the Word of God. For instance, there were those who for many years denied the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch on the basis that writing was not in existence in Moses' day. You haven't heard anybody advance that theory recently, have you? Well, of course not. For years the spade of the archaeologist has turned up again and again evidence of the validity of the Bible. The city of Jericho and the walls that fell down is one example. Now there has been some argument between Miss Kathleen Kenyon and John Garstang relative to specifics, but it's well established that the walls fell down, and I'll let them debate about the time and all that sort of thing. The Word of God has been substantiated there, and in many other ways archaeology has demonstrated the accuracy of the Bible. Many of the manuscripts that have been found do that also. It's quite interesting that when the Isaiah scrolls, the Dead Sea scrolls, were found, the liberal leaped at that because he thought he had found an argument that would discredit the Bible. However, the scrolls have not discredited the Bible, and it seems that the liberal has lost a great deal of interest in them. This is a field into which you might do some research, as I cannot go to any great length in this brief study.

3. Fulfilled Prophecy—If I were asked today if I had just one thing to suggest that would be a conclusive proof that the Bible is the Word of God, do you know what I would suggest? I would suggest fulfilled prophecy. Fulfilled prophecy is the one proof that you can't escape, you can't get around. And the Bible is filled with fulfilled prophecy. One-fourth of the Scripture, when it was written, was prophetic; that is, it announced things that were to take place in the future. A great deal of that—in fact, a great deal more than people imagine—has already been fulfilled. We could turn to many places where prophecy has been fulfilled exactly. We find that there were many local situations that were fulfilled even in the day of the prophet. For example,

Micaiah was the prophet who told Ahab that if he went out to battle as he planned, he would lose the battle and would be killed. However, Ahab's false prophets had told him he'd have a victory and would return as a victorious king. Because he didn't like what Micaiah said, Ahab ordered him locked up and fed bread and water, and he would take care of him when he got back. But Micaiah shot back the last word, "If you come back at all, the Lord hasn't spoken by me." Well, evidently the Lord had spoken by him because Ahab didn't come back. He was killed in the battle, and his army was defeated. He had even disguised himself so that there would be no danger of his losing his life. But an enemy soldier, the Scripture says, pulled his bow at a venture; that is, when the battle was about over, he had just one arrow left in his quiver; he put it in place and shot, not really aiming at anything. But, you know, that arrow had old Ahab's name on it, and it found him. It went right to its mark. Why? Because Micaiah had made an accurate prophecy (see 1 Kings 22).

On another occasion, the prophet Isaiah said that the invading Assyrian army wouldn't shoot an arrow into the city of Jerusalem (see 2 Kings 19:32). Well, now, that's interesting. Micaiah's prophecy was fulfilled because a soldier shot an arrow by chance, pulled his bow at a venture. Wouldn't you think that among two hundred thousand soldiers—that "great host"—perhaps one might be trigger-happy and would pull his bow at a venture and let an arrow fly over the wall of Jerusalem? Well, he didn't. If the enemy had shot an arrow inside that city, they could be sure that Isaiah was not God's prophet. But he was, as was proven by this local fulfillment of his prophecy. But Isaiah also said a virgin would bring forth a child, and that was seven hundred years before it was literally fulfilled. And then, if you want a final proof, there were over three hundred prophecies concerning the first coming of Christ which were all literally fulfilled. As Jesus Christ was hanging there on the cross and dying, there was one prophecy recorded in the Old Testament that had not been fulfilled. It was, "They gave me vinegar to drink" (Psalm 69:21). Jesus said, "I thirst," and the enemy himself went and fulfilled prophecy (see John 19:28-30). It's a most amazing thing. Men can't guess like that. It has been rather amusing to watch the weatherman. During the summer season in Southern California he does fine, but when we get to the change of seasons—well, your guess is as good as his. In the nation Israel, a prophet had to be accurate. If he was not accurate, he was to be put to death as a false prophet. God told His people that they would be able to distinguish a false prophet from a true prophet. A true prophet must first speak into a local situation, which Isaiah did. When that prophecy came to pass, they would know they could trust him to speak concerning the future, as Isaiah did. We can look back now and know that it was fulfilled.

There are so many other prophecies. Tyre and Sidon are over there today exactly as God's Word said twenty-five hundred years ago they would be. Egypt today is in the exact position God said it would be in. All of these are amazing, friend, and fulfilled prophecy is one of the greatest proofs that the Bible is indeed the Word of God. You see, men just can't be that accurate. Men can't guess like that—even the weatherman misses it.

Let me show you that, according to mathematical law of problematical conjecture, man could never, never prophesy. Suppose that right now I would make a prophecy. Just by way of illustration, suppose I'd say that wherever you are it's going to rain tomorrow. I'd have a 50 percent change of being right because it'll do one of the two. For some of you it would probably be accurate. For others it would not. But suppose that I add to that and say it would start raining tomorrow morning at nine o'clock. That would be another uncertain element. I had a fifty-fifty chance of being right at first; now I have a 25 percent chance. Every uncertain element that is added reduces by 50 percent the chance of my being right—the law of problematical conjecture. Now suppose that I not only say that it's going to start raining at nine o'clock, but I also say it'll stop raining at two o'clock. Well, believe me, friend, that has reduced my chances now another 50 percent which brings it down to 12 percent. Can you imagine my chance of being right now? But suppose I add three hundred uncertain elements. There's not a ghost of a chance of being accurate. I just couldn't hit it—it would be impossible. Yet the Word of God hit it, my friend. It is accurate. The Bible has moved into that area of absolute impossibility, and that to me is absolute proof that it is the Word of God. There is nothing to compare to it at all. I have given very few examples of fulfilled prophecy, but there is in the Word of God prophecy after prophecy, and they have been fulfilled—literally fulfilled. And by the way, I would think that that indicates the

method in which prophecy for the future is yet to be fulfilled.

4. Transformed Lives—I offer two final reasons as proof that the Bible is the Word of God. One is the transformed lives of believers today. I have seen what the Word of God can do in the lives of men and women. I'm thinking right now of a man in Oakland, California, who listened to my Bible-teaching program. I know this man. I'm not going into detail in his life at all, but he probably had as many problems, as many hang-ups, and he was in as much sin as any man that I know anything about. And this man began to listen to the radio program. I hear of people who just hear the gospel once and are converted. I think it's possible and that it's wonderful. But this man listened to it week after week, and he became antagonistic. He became angry. Later he said to me, "If I could have gotten to you when you were teaching the Epistle to the Romans and told me that I was a sinner, I would have hit you in the nose," and frankly, friend, I think he could have done it. He's much bigger and much younger than I am. I'm glad he couldn't get to me. Finally, this man turned to Christ. May I say to you, it has been wonderful to see what God has done in his life. Again and again and again this testimony could be multiplied. Young and old have found purpose and fulfillment in life, marriages have been saved, families reunited, individuals have been freed from alcoholism and drug addiction. Folk have had their lives transformed by coming to Christ. Now let me give you a reason. When I finished seminary, I was a preacher who majored in the realm of the defense of the gospel, and I attempted to defend the Bible. In fact, I think every message I gave entered into that area. I felt if I could just get enough answers to the questions that people have for not believing the Bible that they would believe. But I found out that the worst thing I could do was to whip a man down intellectually. The minute I did that, I made an enemy and never could win him for the Lord. So I moved out of the realm of apologetics and into another area of just giving out the Word of God as simply as I could. Only the Bible can turn a sinner into a saint.

5. Spirit of God Made it Real—Another reason that I've moved out of the realm of apologetics is because there has been a certain development in my own life. I have reached the place today where I not only believe that the Bible is the Word of God, I *know* it's the Word of God. And I know it's the Word of God because the Spirit of God has made it real to my own heart and my own life. That is the thing that Paul talked to the Colossians about. He prayed that they "might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding." I also want this, because I found out that the Spirit of God can confirm these things to your heart and that you don't need archaeology or anything else to prove that the Bible is God's Word. A young preacher said to me some time ago, "Dr. McGee, isn't it wonderful that they have discovered this," and he mentioned something in particular. And I said, "Well, I don't see anything to be excited about." He was greatly disappointed and even chagrined that I was so far away from it that I did not respond enthusiastically. "Why, what do you mean?" he asked. "Is it possible that this hasn't impressed you?" Well, I answered him this way, "I already knew it was the Word of God long before the spade of the archaeologist turned that up." He asked how I knew it, and I said, "The Spirit of God has been making it real to my own heart." I trust that the Spirit of God is going to make the Word of God not only real to you to incorporate into your living, but that He is also going to give you that assurance that you can say, "I *know* that it's the Word of God."

Whence but from Heaven, could men unskilled in arts,
In several ages born, in several parts,
Weave such agreeing truths, or how, or why,
Should all conspire to cheat us with a lie?
Unasked their pains, ungrateful their advice,
Starving their gain, and martyrdom their price.

—John Dryden

WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY REVELATION? INSPIRATION? ILLUMINATION? INTERPRETATION?

Revelation means that God has spoken and that God has communicated to man. *Inspiration* guarantees the revelation of God. *Illumination* has to do with the Spirit of God being the Teacher—He communicates. *Interpretation* has to do with the interpretation that you and I give to the Word of God.

Revelation

Revelation means that God has spoken. "Thus saith the Lord,"

and its equivalent, occurs over twenty-five hundred times. The Lord didn't want you to misunderstand that He had spoken. Notice Hebrews 1:1, 2:

> ***God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds.***

Wherever you will find two persons, endowed with a reasonable degree of intelligence, who harbor the same feelings and desires, who are attracted to each other more or less, you will find communication between them. Persons of like propensities, separated from each other, delight in getting in touch with each other and rejoice in receiving communication from each other. This innate characteristic of the human heart explains the post office department, the telephone, and the telegraph.

Friends communicate with friends. A husband away from home writes to his wife. A boy or girl at school will write home to dad and mom. And ever and anon there travels the scented epistle of a girl to a boy, and then the boy returns an epistle to the girl. All of this is called communication. It is the expression of the heart. The Scripture says, "Deep calls to deep." You will recall the story of Helen Keller. I remember the thrill that came to me when I read the account of this woman, shut out from the world by blindness and deafness, without means of communication; and then a way was opened up so she could communicate—probably better than many of us who can see and hear.

Now, on the basis of all this, I would like to ask you what I believe is a reasonable and certainly an intelligent question: Isn't it reasonable to conclude that God has communicated with His creatures to whom He has committed a certain degree of intelligence and whom He created in His likeness? May I say to you, if we did not have a revelation from God, right now I think that you and I could just wait and He would be speaking to us, because we could *expect* God to speak to us. You will notice that the writer to the Hebrews says that God in the Old Testament spoke through the prophets, and He now has spoken through Christ. Both the revelation to the prophets in the Old Testament and the revelation of Christ in the New Testament are in the Word of God, of course, and that is the only way we would know about the communication from either one. The Bible has sixty-six books, and God has spoken to us through them.

> *This Book contains the mind of God, the state of man, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners and the happiness of believers. Its doctrines are holy, its precepts are binding, its histories are true, and its decisions are immutable. Read it to be wise, believe it to be safe and practice it to be holy. It contains light to direct you, food to support you and comfort to cheer you. It is the traveler's map, the pilgrim's staff, the pilot's compass, the soldier's sword and the Christian's character. Here paradise is restored, heaven opened and the gates of hell disclosed. Christ is its grand object, our good is its design and the glory of God its end. It should fill the memory, rule the heart, and guide the feet. Read it slowly, frequently, and prayerfully. It is given you in life and will be opened in the judgment and will be remembered forever. It involves the highest responsibility, will reward the greatest labour, and will condemn all who trifle with its sacred contents.*
>
> —Author unknown

Inspiration

This brings us to the second great subject which is *inspiration*. I personally believe in what is known as the plenary verbal inspiration of the Scriptures, which means that the Bible is an authoritative statement and that every word of it is the Word of God to us and for us in this day in which we live. Inspiration guarantees the revelation of God. And that is exactly what this Book says. Two men, both Paul writing his last epistle to Timothy and Peter writing his last epistle, had something pretty definite to say about the Bible:

> ***All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.*** (2

Timothy 3:16, 17 NSRB*)

Notice that *all* Scripture is given by inspiration. The word "inspiration" means God *breathed*. God said through these men, as He said here through Paul, exactly what He wanted to say. He hasn't anything else to add. Peter expresses it this way:

> ***For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.*** (2 Peter 1:21)

It is very important to see that these men were moved, as it were, carried along, by the Holy Spirit of God. It was Bishop Westcott who said: "The thoughts are wedded to words as necessarily as the soul is to the body." And Dr. Keiper said, "You can as easily have music without notes, or mathematics without figures, as thoughts without words." It is not the thoughts that are inspired; it's the *words* that are inspired.

There is a little whimsical story of a girl who had taken singing lessons from a very famous teacher. He was present at her recital, and after it was over she was anxious to know his reaction. He didn't come backstage to congratulate her, and she asked a friend, "What did he say?" Her loyal friend answered, "He said that you sang heavenly." She couldn't quite believe that her teacher had said that; so she probed, "Is that *exactly* what he said?" "Well, no, but that is what he meant." The girl insisted, "Tell me the exact *words* that he used." "Well, his exact words were, 'That was an unearthly noise!'" May I say to you, there is a difference between unearthly noise and heavenly sound. Exact words are important.

Believe me, it is the words of Scripture that are inspired—not the thoughts, but the words. For instance, Satan was not inspired to tell a lie, but the Bible records that he told a lie. It's the words that are inspired. And the Lord Jesus said, "It is written," quoting the Word of God in the Old Testament—the men who wrote gave out what God had to say. In Exodus 20:1 Moses wrote: "And God spoke all these words, saying . . . ." It was God who did the speaking, and Moses wrote what He said.

Over the years there have been discovered many very excellent manuscripts of the Scriptures. Speaking of the manuscripts in Britain, Sir George Kenyon, the late director and principal librarian of the British Museum, made this statement: "Thanks to these manuscripts, the ordinary reader of the Bible may feel comfortable about the soundness of the text. Apart from a few unimportant verbal alterations, natural in books transcribed by hand, the New Testament, we now feel assured, has come down intact." We can be sure today that we have that which is as close to the autographs as anything possibly can be, and I believe in the verbal plenary inspiration of the autographs—that is, the original manuscripts.

Way back yonder in the second century Irenaeus, one of the church fathers, wrote: "The Scriptures indeed are perfect, forasmuch as they are spoken by the Word of God and by His Spirit." Augustine, living in the fifth century, made this statement, "Let us therefore yield ourselves and bow to the authority of the Holy Scriptures which can neither err nor deceive." And Spurgeon commented, "I can never doubt the doctrine of plenary verbal inspiration; since I so constantly see, in actual practice, how the very words that God has been pleased to use—a plural instead of a singular—are blessed to the souls of men." *God* speaks in this Book to our hearts and to our lives.

Illumination

Illumination means that since you and I have a Book, a God-Book and a human Book, written by men who were expressing their thoughts and while doing this they were writing down the Word of God, only the Spirit of God can teach it to us. Although we can get the facts of the Bible on our own, the Spirit of God will have to open our minds and hearts if we are to understand the spiritual truth that is there.

Paul, writing to the Corinthians, said:

> ***But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.*** (1 Corinthians 2:7-9)

*New Scofield Reference Bible

Now you and I get most of what we know through the eye gate and the ear gate or by reason. Paul tells us here that there are certain things that eye has not seen nor ear heard, certain things that you can't get into your mind at all. Then how in the world are you going to get them?

> ***But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.*** (1 Corinthians 2:10)

Verse 9 sometimes goes to a funeral. The minister implies that the one who has died didn't know too much down here, but now he will know things he did not know before. While that probably is true (we will get quite an education in heaven), that is not what the verse says. Long before you get to the undertaker, there are a lot of things down here that you and I can't learn through natural means. The Holy Spirit has to be our Teacher.

You remember that our Lord inquired of His disciples, "What are men saying about Me?" They said that some were saying one thing and some another. (And today you can get a different answer from almost every person you happen to ask. There are many viewpoints of Him.) Then He asked His disciples:

> ***. . . But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.*** (Matthew 16:15-17)

God is the One who revealed the truth to Simon Peter. And today only God can open up the Word of God for us to really understand it.

On the day of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, He walked down the Emmaus road and joined a couple of men as they walked along. Entering into their conversation, He asked them:

> ***. . . What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad? And the one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answering said unto him, Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days? And he said unto them, What things? And they said unto him, Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people: and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him to be condemned to death, and have crucified him.*** (Luke 24:17-20)

As you will recall, Jesus had predicted that. And it is interesting to see that written prophecy had been saying it for years. Then they expressed the hope that had been theirs:

> ***But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel: and beside all this, today is the third day since these things were done.*** (Luke 24:21)

And they went on to tell about what they knew and what the women had reported. "Those who were with us went to the sepulcher . . . but Him they saw not." Their hopes had dimmed, and darkness had entered their hearts. Now listen to the Lord Jesus:

> ***. . . O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.*** (Luke 24:25-27)

Friend, wouldn't you have loved to have been there that day and heard Him go back in the Old Testament and lift out the Scriptures concerning Himself? And after He finally made Himself known to them as they sat at the evening meal, this is their comment:

> ***. . . Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?*** (Luke 24:32)

You see, we are studying a Book that is different from any other book. It is not that I just believe in the inspiration of the Bible, I believe that it is a closed Book to you unless the Spirit of God will open your heart and make it real. When Jesus returned to Jerusalem at that time, He continued teaching the disciples:

> ***And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me.*** (Luke 24:44)

Notice that He believed Moses wrote the Pentateuch; He believed the prophets spoke of Him and that the Psalms pointed to Him. Now here is the important verse:

> ***Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures.*** (Luke 24:45)

And, friend, if He doesn't open your understanding, you're just not going to get it, that's all. That is the reason we ought to approach this Book with great humility of mind, regardless of how high our IQ is or the extent of our education.

Referring back to 1 Corinthians, Paul goes on to say:

> ***Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Spirit teacheth, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*** (1 Corinthians 2:13, 14 NSRB)

I am never disturbed when one of these unbelievers, even if he's a preacher, comes along and says he no longer believes the Bible is the Word of God (he never did believe it, to tell the truth) because that's the way he *should* talk. After all, if he is not a believer, he cannot understand it. Mark Twain, who was no believer, said that he was not disturbed by what he did not understand in the Bible. What worried him were the things he *did* understand. There are things an unbeliever can understand, and it's those which cause many to reject the Word of God. It was Pascal who said, "Human knowledge must be understood to be loved, but Divine knowledge must be loved to be understood."

As I leave the subject of illumination let me add this: Only the Spirit of God can open your mind and heart to see and to accept Christ and to trust Him as your Savior. How wonderful! I have always felt as I entered the pulpit how helpless I am because, believe me, Vernon McGee can't convert anyone. But I not only feel weak, I also feel mighty—not mighty in myself, but in the knowledge that the Spirit of God can take my dead words and make them real and living.

Interpretation

Interpretation has to do with the interpretation that you and I give to the Word of God. And this is the reason there are Methodists and Baptists and Presbyterians, this kind of teacher and that kind of teacher—we all have our interpretations. And where there is disagreement, somebody is evidently wrong.

There are several rules that should be followed as we attempt to interpret the Bible.

1. The overall purpose of the Bible should first be considered. And that is the reason I teach all of it—because I believe you need to have it all before you can come to any dogmatic conclusion concerning any particular verse of Scripture. It is important to take into consideration all verses that are related to that subject.

2. To whom the Scripture is addressed should next be considered. For instance, way back yonder God said to Joshua, "Arise, go over this Jordan" (Joshua 1:2). When I was over in that land, I crossed the Jordan River, but I didn't cross it to fulfill that Scripture. And I didn't say, "At last I've obeyed the Lord and have crossed over Jordan." No. When I read that verse I know the Lord is talking to Joshua—but I believe there is a tremendous lesson there for me. All Scripture is not *to* me, but all Scripture is *for* me. That is a good rule to keep in mind.

3. The immediate context before and after a Scripture should be observed. What is the passage talking about? And what other passages of Scripture deal with the same thing?

4. Discover what the original says. If you do not read Hebrew or Greek, when you read the American Standard Version of 1901 you're right close to what the Lord said. Frankly, I cannot recommend the modern translations, although there are good things in them. I have found that because we are so divided doctrinally, every group that attempts to translate the Bible just naturally injects into the transla-

tion their particular viewpoint. Therefore, if the liberal is going to do the translating, you may get a taste of liberalism. If the fundamentalist is going to do the translating, you'll get his bias in certain places. However, the men who did the original English translations were men who believed that the Bible was the Word of God and handled it accordingly. When there were words they could not translate, they simply transliterated them (for instance, *Abba* and *baptizo*). The danger in modern translations is that translation is done in a dogmatic fashion. When you translate, you have to take something out of one language and put it into another language in comparable terms—identical terms if possible. The thing that most of our modern translators are trying to do is to get it into modern speech. And in doing so, they really miss what the original is saying. Personally, I stick by the Authorized King James Version. I feel that *The New Scofield Reference Bible* (NSRB) has made a tremendous step forward in making certain distinctions and corrections that needed to be made in the Authorized Version. I recommend that also, although I still use my old *Scofield Reference Bible*. I know my way around through the Book, and, after all, the old scout will follow the old trail. However, the important thing is to attempt to determine the exact words of the original.

5. Interpret the Bible literally. The late Dr. David Cooper has stated it well: "When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths, indicate clearly otherwise."

GUIDELINES

Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law. (Psalm 119:18)

There are certain guidelines that each of us should follow relative to the Word of God. I guarantee that if you will follow these guidelines, blessing will come to your heart and life. Certainly there should be these directions in the study of Scripture. Today a bottle of patented medicine, no matter how simple it might be, has directions for the use of it. And any little gadget that you buy in a five-and-ten-cent store has with it directions for its operation. If that is true of the things of this world, certainly the all-important Word of God should have a few directions and instructions on the study of it. I want to mention seven very simple, yet basic, preliminary steps that will be a guide for the study of the Word of God.

1. Begin with prayer
2. Read the Bible
3. Study the Bible
4. Meditate on the Bible
5. Read what others have written on the Bible
6. Obey the Bible
7. Pass it on to others

You may want to add to these, but I believe these are basic and primary. Someone has put it in a very brief, cogent manner: "The Bible—know it in your head; stow it in your heart; show it in your life; sow it in the world." That is another way of saying some of the things we are going to present here.

1. Begin with Prayer

As we saw when we dealt with the subject of illumination, the Bible differs from other books in that the Holy Spirit alone can open our minds to understand it. You can take up a book on philosophy, and if a man wrote it (and he did), then a man can understand it. The same is true of higher mathematics or any other subject. There is not a book that ever has been written by any man that another man cannot understand. But the Bible is different. The Bible cannot be understood unless the Holy Spirit is the Instructor. And He wants to teach

us. The fact of the matter is, our Lord told us, "He will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13). When we open the Word of God we need to begin with the psalmist's prayer:

> ***Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.*** (Psalm 119:18)

When the psalmist wrote these lines, he had in mind the Mosaic system, of course; but we widen that out to include the sixty-six books of the Bible and pray today, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy *Word*."

When the Apostle Paul was praying for the Ephesians, he did not pray for their health (although he may have at another time), and he did not pray that they might get wealthy (I don't know that he ever did that), but Paul's first prayer for these Ephesians is recorded in his little epistle to them:

> ***Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers.*** (Ephesians 1:15, 16)

Now what would Paul pray for? Here it is:

> ***That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.*** (Ephesians 1:17, 18)

Paul's prayer, you see, is that they might have a wisdom and an understanding of the revelation of the knowledge of Him—that is, that they might know the Word of God. And that the eyes of their understanding might be enlightened, that they might know something of the hope of the calling they had in Christ. This is the prayer of the apostle Paul. And if anyone remembers me in prayer, this is exactly what I want them to pray for—that my eyes (my spiritual eyes) might be open. Also I would like to remember you in prayer that way. I believe the most important thing for you and me today is to know the will of God—and the will of God is the Word of God. We cannot know the Word of God unless the Spirit of God is our Teacher. That is what Paul says over in the first epistle to the Corinthians:

> ***Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Spirit teacheth, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*** (1 Corinthians 2:12-14 NSRB)

The reason today that so many don't get anything out of the Bible is simply because they are not letting the Spirit of God teach them. The Word of God is different from any other book, you see, because the natural man cannot receive these things. To him they are foolishness. God has given to us the Spirit that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. He alone is our Teacher; He alone can take the Word of God and make it real and living to us.

God *wants* to communicate with us through His written Word. But it is a supernatural Book, and it will not communicate to us on the natural plane for the very simple reason that only the Spirit of God can take the things of Christ and reveal them to us. Notice this very interesting verse of Scripture:

> ***For what man knoweth the things of a man, except the spirit of man which is in him? Even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.*** (1 Corinthians 2:11 NSRB)

In a very succinct and understandable manner, this gives the reason the Spirit of God must be our Teacher. You and I understand each other, but we do not understand God. I believe it is perfect nonsense to talk about a generation gap through which we cannot communicate. While it has always been true that it is difficult for an older person and a younger person to see eye to eye, we can communicate with each other because we are all human beings. We understand each

other. But, frankly, I don't understand God unless He is revealed to me. I do not know how God feels. I used to wonder how He would feel at a funeral. Well, I find the Lord Jesus there at the funeral of Lazarus and see that He wept. I know how He feels today. I know how He feels about many things because the Spirit of God through the Word of God has revealed them to me.

When I was pastor in Nashville, Tennessee, I got up one bright morning and looked out my window. During the night about five inches of snow had fallen and covered up all the ugliness with a beautiful blanket. I sat upstairs in my study looking out over the scene when I noticed an elder of my church, who lived next door, come out on his porch with two coal scuttles filled with ashes which he was going to empty in the alley. I saw him stop and look over the landscape, and I just smiled because I knew how he felt—just like I felt, looking out on that snow that had fallen during the night. But when he started down the steps, he slipped. Not wanting to spill the ashes, he held them out and hit one of those steps with a real bump. I couldn't help but laugh. I guess if he had broken his neck I still would have laughed. But I noticed that he looked around, and when he was satisfied that nobody had seen him, he got up with great satisfaction and started out again. About half way out on the sidewalk we had a repeat performance; only this time he fell much farther because it was all the way to the sidewalk. And it looked to me like he bounced when he hit. This time he really scanned the landscape. He didn't want anybody to see what he had done. And I knew how he felt. I would have felt the same way. He got up and looked over the landscape, went out and emptied his ashes, and when he got back to the porch, he looked over the landscape again—I don't think this time to admire the scene but to make good and sure that no one had seen him fall. I didn't say a word until Sunday morning. When I came into the church, I went right by where he sat, leaned down and said, "You sure did look funny yesterday carrying out the ashes!" He looked at me in amazement. He said, "Did you see me?" I said, "Yes." "Well," he said, "I didn't think anybody saw me." And I said, "I thought that. I knew exactly how you felt." You see, he had a human spirit and I had a human spirit—we understood each other. But who can understand God? The Spirit of God. And that is the reason the Holy Spirit teaches us, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

Renan, the French skeptic, made an attack on the Word of God, as you may know; yet he wrote a *Life of Christ*. His book is divided into two sections, one is the historical section, the other is the interpretation of the life of Christ. As far as the first part is concerned, there probably has never been a more brilliant life of Christ written by any man. But his interpretation of it is positively absurd. It could have been done better by a twelve-year-old Sunday school boy. What is the explanation of that? Well, the Spirit of God does not teach you history or give you facts that you can dig out for yourself; a very clever mind can dig out those. But the interpretation is altogether different. The Spirit of God has to do the interpreting, and He alone must be the Teacher to lead us and guide us into all truth. We must have the Spirit of God to open our eyes to see.

And we are told to ask His help. In John 16 the Lord Jesus says,

> ***I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Nevertheless, when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth; for he shall not speak of himself, but whatever he shall hear, that shall he speak; and he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me; for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine; therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall show it unto you. A little while, and ye shall not see me; and again, a little while, and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father.***
> (John 16:12-16 NSRB)

So the Lord Jesus is saying that we are to ask. He has many things for us, and He has sent the Holy Spirit to be the Teacher. Again over in chapter 14 He says,

> ***But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.*** (John 14:26)

The Holy Spirit is the Teacher, and He must be the One to lead us and guide us into all truth, friend. If you ever learn anything through my Bible study program, it will not be because this poor preacher is the

teacher, it will be because the Spirit of God is opening up the Word of God to you.

This, then, is the first guideline: Begin with prayer and ask the Spirit of God to be your Teacher.

2. Read the Bible.

The second guideline may seem oversimplified. Someone asked a great Shakespearean scholar years ago, "How do you study Shakespeare?" His answer was very terse, "Read Shakespeare." And I would say to you: Read the Word of God. Do you want to know what the Bible has to say? Read the Bible. Over and above what any teacher may give you, it is all-important to read for yourself what the Bible has to say.

Dr. G. Campbell Morgan has written some very wonderful and helpful commentaries on the Bible. In fact, he has a series of books that I recommend on all sixty-six books of the Bible. I know of nothing that is any better than them, and when I started out as a student, they had a great influence on my study of the Word. It is said of him that he would not put pen to paper until he had read a particular book of the Bible through fifty times. So don't be weary in well doing, friend; just read the Word of God. If you don't get it the first time, read it the second time. If you don't get it the second time, read it the third time. Keep on reading it. We are to get the facts of the Word of God.

There is a very interesting incident over in the Book of Nehemiah:

> ***And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate; and they spoke unto Ezra, the scribe, to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded to Israel. And Ezra, the priest, brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all who could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month. And he read from it facing the street that was before the water gate from the morning until midday, before the men and the women, and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law.*** (Nehemiah 8:1-3 NSRB)

This is a very remarkable passage of Scripture. You see, these people had been in Babylonian captivity seventy years; many of them had never heard the Word of God. It did not circulate much in that day. There were not a hundred different translations abroad nor new ones coming off the press all the time. Probably there were just one or two copies in existence, and Ezra had one of those copies. He stood and read before the water gate.

> ***So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.*** (Nehemiah 8:8 NSRB)

From the way the account is given, I assume that men of the tribe of Levi were stationed in certain areas among the people. After Ezra had read a certain portion, he would stop to give the people who had listened an opportunity to ask questions of the men who were stationed out there to explain the Bible to them.

> ***. . . And the Levites caused the people to understand the law; and the people stood in their place.*** (Nehemiah 8:7 NSRB)

Not only did they read the Word, but they caused the people to understand it.

We need to read the Bible.

There are so many distractions today from the study of the Word of God. And the greatest distraction we have is the church. The church is made up of committees and organizations and banquets and entertainments and promotional schemes to the extent that the Word of God is not even dealt with in many churches today. There are churches that have disbanded the preaching service altogether. Instead they have a time in which the people will be able to express themselves and say what they are thinking. I can't imagine anything more puerile or more of a waste of time than that (although it is a fine excuse to get out of preaching for a lazy preacher who will not read or study the Bible). I find that the people who are more ignorant of the Bible than anyone else are church members. They simply do not know the Word of God. And it has been years since it has been taught

in the average church. We need to read the Bible. We need to get into the Word of God—not just reading a few favorite verses, but reading the *entire* Word of God. That is the only way we are going to know it, friend. That is God's method.

WHEN YOU READ THE BIBLE THROUGH

I supposed I knew my Bible,
Reading piecemeal, hit or miss,
Now a bit of John or Matthew,
Now a snatch of Genesis,
Certain chapters of Isaiah,
Certain Psalms (the twenty-third),
Twelfth of Romans, First of Proverbs—
Yes, I thought I knew the Word!
But I found that thorough reading
Was a different thing to do,
And the way was unfamiliar
When I read the Bible through.
You who like to play at Bible,
Dip and dabble, here and there,
Just before you kneel, aweary,
And yawn through a hurried prayer;
You who treat the Crown of Writings
As you treat no other book—
Just a paragraph disjointed,
Just a crude impatient look—
Try a worthier procedure,
Try a broad and steady view;
You will kneel in very rapture
When you read the Bible through!

—Amos R. Wells

Then the third guideline is . . .

3. Study the Bible.

Someone came to Dr. Morgan, years ago, and said, "You speak as though you are inspired!" Dr. Morgan replied, "Inspiration is 95 percent perspiration." The Bible needs to be studied. We need to realize that the Spirit of God will not teach us something that we could get ourselves by study. I used to teach the Bible in a Bible Institute, and the classes were made up of all kinds of young folk. Among them were a few very pious individuals, and I understood these young people very well after a period of time—I confess I didn't understand them at first. Their pious facade, I found, covered up a tremendous ignorance and vacuum relative to the Word of God. Some of them would not study the night before an exam. They always would give an excuse that they were busy in a prayer meeting or a service somewhere. I had the feeling that some of them believed that they could put their Bibles under their pillows at night and, as they slept, there would come up through the duck feathers the names of the kings of Israel and Judah! Believe me, it won't come up through the duck feathers. We have to knuckle down and study the Word of God. A fellow student in a Bible class when I was in college said, "Doctor, you have assigned us a section that is very dry." The professor, without even missing a step, said to him, "Then dampen it a little with sweat from your brow." The Bible should be studied, and it is very important to see that. There is a certain knowledge that the Spirit of God is not going to give you. I do not think He is revealing truth to lazy people. After all, you never learn logarithms or geometry or Greek by reading a chapter of it just before you go to sleep at night!

Now you may be shocked when I say that I do not encourage devotional reading of the Bible. Over a period of years I have learned that a great many people who are very faithful in what they call devotional reading are very ignorant of the Bible. I stayed with a family for over a week when I was holding meetings in a place in middle Tennessee. Every morning at the breakfast table we had devotions. Unfortunately, breakfast was always a little late, and Susie and Willie were rushing to get away to school. I am confident that they didn't even know what was read. Dad was wanting to get away to work, and he generally made the Bible reading very brief. Always he'd say, "Well, I'll read this familiar passage this morning because we don't have much time." And, believe me, we didn't. By the time the reading was over, Susie and Willie left the table like they were shot out of a gun, and Dad got out of there almost as quickly as they did, and Mother was left with the dishes—and I wondered if she had really heard what had been read. I determined right there and then that in my home we wouldn't have devotional reading. I have always

encouraged members of my family to read the Bible on their own. That is the reading that is profitable.

Someone is going to say, "But I have my devotions at night after the day is over." Now really, don't you have them right before you go to bed? You've got one foot in bed already, one eye is already closed, and you turn to a passage of Scripture to read. Now, friend, you cannot learn mathematics that way. You cannot learn literature that way. You cannot learn the *Bible* that way. You have to *study* the Word of God. You ought to read it when you can give time to it. And if you can't find time, you ought to *make* time. Set apart thirty minutes or an hour. Or if you do things haphazardly like I do, read thirty minutes one day, perhaps only five minutes the next day, and two or three hours the next day, however it fits into your program. I put down no particular rule except that each person should read for himself, and boys and girls should be encouraged to read the Bible for themselves. Some folks feel that they ought to have devotional reading together. And that is fine, if the Lord leads you to do it, but I guarantee you will not be intelligent Bible students after twenty years of doing it like that. You also need to study the Word of God on your own.

It was said of John Wesley that he was a man of one Book. What made him a man of one Book? Well, he got up and read the Bible at four and five o'clock every morning—read it in five different languages. Believe me, he studied the Word of God. And you and I need to study the Word; we need to get the meaning of the Bible.

This leads me to the fourth guideline:

4. Meditate on the Bible.

Meditation is something that God taught His people. The Word of God was to be before the children of Israel all the time—so that they could meditate on it.

> ***And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.*** (Deuteronomy 6:6-9)

Now that is an amazing statement coming from the Lord. He told them to write the Word of God upon the doorposts. In other words, wherever they turned, it was just like looking at billboards. You cannot drive up and down our streets and highways without seeing liquor signs and cigarette signs—billboards galore! Now you can understand why people today drink liquor and why they smoke cigarettes—it is before them all the time. The Lord knew human nature. He knew us. And He told His people to get the Word where they would see it. It was on their doorposts, on their gates, and they wore it on their garments. And they were to talk about it when they were walking. They were to talk about the Word when they sat down. They were to talk about it when they went to bed and until they went to sleep. God asked His people to meditate on His Word.

Now what does it really mean to meditate on the Word of God? There is a very interesting statement over in the First Psalm:

> ***Blessed is the man who walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.*** (Psalm 1:1, 2 NSRB)

To meditate is to ruminate, to bring to mind and consider over and over. Ruminating is what a cow is doing when she is chewing her cud. You know how the old cow goes out of a morning, and while the grass is fresh with dew she grazes. Then when the sun comes up and the weather is hot, the old cow lies down under a tree, or stands there in the shade. You see her chewing and you wonder what in the world that cow is chewing. She will chew there for an hour or two. Well, she is meditating, friend. She is bringing the grass she ate of a morning (we are told that a cow has a complex stomach) out of one chamber and is transferring it to another. In the process she is going over it again, chewing it up good. You and I need to learn to do that in our thought processes. We are to get the Word of God, read it, have it out where we can look at it, then think about it, meditate on it.

Many times in preparing a message I'll take a verse of Scripture

and spend hours doing nothing but reading it over and over, checking what others have said about it, and just keep reading it. Finally new truth will break out from that particular passage. I remember hearing Dr. Harry Ironside say that he had heard a lecture on the Song of Solomon which left him dissatisfied. He said that he read the Song of Solomon again, got down on his knees and asked God to give him an understanding of it. He did that again and again—in fact, he did it for weeks and months. Finally new light broke from that book. When I teach the Song of Solomon I generally give his interpretation for two reasons: it satisfies my own mind and heart more than does any other interpretation I have heard, and also I know the man who got it had spent a great deal of time in meditation.

There are folk who write to us saying that the wife listens to our Bible study by radio at home, and the husband listens to it at work, and of an evening at the dinner table they discuss the Scripture that was covered. That is meditation; it is going back over it again. Riding along in the car alone is a good place to take a passage of Scripture and really give thought to it.

How many of you, after you have had "devotions," meditate upon that passage during the day? Most people read it and then forget it—never thinking about it again until it is called to their attention. Or, if they read it at night, they jump into bed as quickly as they can, turn out the light, and go to sleep, forgetting all about it. Meditation is almost a lost art in our contemporary society. Frankly, television in many homes absolutely blots out the possibility for meditation. It is changing the spiritual life of many families today. One of the reasons that our churches are becoming colder and more indifferent to the Word of God is simply because there is that lack of meditation upon the Word of God.

Remember (in Acts, chapter 8) the Ethiopian eunuch who was riding along reading Isaiah. He was actually studying Isaiah, because he was in a passage with which he was having trouble—he did not know what it meant. Here is a man who is reading and studying, and the Spirit of God is going to open the Word of God to him. That is the reason the Holy Spirit had Philip there to explain the chapter to the Ethiopian. It opened up a new world to him, and he came to know Christ. The record says that he went on his way rejoicing. What was making him rejoice? He was meditating, friend. He was going back over that fifty-third chapter of Isaiah. Have you ever meditated on that Lamb who was brought as a sheep to the slaughter? Who was He? He came down here and identified Himself with us who like sheep have gone astray and have turned every one to our own way. And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. How often do you meditate on these things? Well, the Ethiopian did. It always has been a matter of speculation as to what he did after that. Tradition says that he went back to his land and founded the Coptic church of Ethiopia. That could well be; we do not know. However, the interesting thing is that he went on his way rejoicing, which lets us know that he was meditating on the Word of God.

5. Read what others have written on the Scriptures.

I know that this is a dangerous rule, because many folk depend on what someone else says about it. Also there are many books on the market today that give wrong teaching concerning the Word of God. We need to test everything that is written by the Bible itself.

However, you and I should consult a good commentary. With each outline of the books of the Bible I list recommended books, commentaries that I have read and have found helpful. You will find it very profitable to read what others have said. Actually you are getting all the distilled sweetness and study of the centuries when you read books written by men who have been guided in their study by the Spirit of God. You and I should profit by this. There have been some wonderful, profound works on the books of the Bible.

In addition to commentaries, a concordance is invaluable. I can recommend three: Young's concordance, Strong's concordance, and Cruden's concordance—take your pick. Also you will need a good Bible dictionary. The Davis Bible dictionary is good if you don't get the wrong edition. *Unger's Bible Dictionary* I can recommend without reservation.

Every teacher and preacher of the gospel has a set of books that he studies. He needs them. Someone asks, "Should he present verbatim what somebody else has written?" No, he should never do that, unless he gives credit to the author. But he has a perfect right to use what others have written. I have been told that some of my feeble messages are given by others, and sometimes credit is given and sometimes no mention is made of the author at all. As far as I'm per-

sonally concerned, it makes no difference, but it does reveal the character of the individual who will use someone else's material verbatim and not give credit for it. A professor in seminary solved this problem. When someone asked him if he should quote other writers, he said, "You ought to graze on everybody's pasture, but give your own milk." And that means that you are to read what others have written, but you put it in your own thought patterns and express it your way. You have a perfect right to do that. The important thing is that we should take advantage of the study of other men in the Word of God.

6. Obey the Bible.

For the understanding and the study of the Scriptures, *obedience* is essential. Abraham is an example of this. God appeared to him when He called him out of Ur of the Chaldees and again when he was in the Promised Land. But Abraham ran off to Egypt when famine came, and during this time God had no word for him. Not until Abraham was back in the land did God appear to him again. Why? Because of lack of obedience. Until Abraham obeyed what God had already revealed to him, God was not prepared to give to him any new truth. So it is with us. When we obey, God opens up new truth for us.

Even the gospel which is given to save our souls is given for the very definite purpose of obedience. The greatest document that ever has been written on the gospel is the epistle to the Romans. And Paul put around the gospel this matter of obedience. He begins with it:

> ***By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name.*** (Romans 1:5)

Again, at the end of Romans Paul comes back to this:

> ***But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith.*** (Romans 16:26)

"Obedience of faith" is the last thing Paul says in this epistle. What is between? He sets before us what the gospel is, that great doctrinal section; then he concludes with a section on duty—what we're to do. Paul put around the gospel this matter of obedience.

Obedience to the faith. This is where Adam and Eve went wrong. Eve not only listened to Satan, the enemy of God, but she also disobeyed God.

Obedience to God is very important. And we must recognize that God will not continue to reveal truth to us if we become disobedient. We must obey the Bible if we are to profit from its reading.

Also obedience is important because there are folk who measure Christianity by you and by me. Cowan has well said, "The best way to defend the Gospel is to live a life worthy of the Gospel." That is the way you prove it is the Word of God.

Four clergymen were discussing the merits of various translations of the Bible. One liked the King James Version best because of its simple, beautiful English. Another liked the American Standard Version because it is more literal and comes nearer to the Hebrew and Greek texts. Still another liked a modern translation because of its up-to-date vocabulary. The fourth minister was silent. When asked to express his opinion, he replied, "I like my mother's translation best. She translated it into life, and it was the most convincing translation I have ever seen."

You will recall that Paul wrote to the Corinthian Christians:

> ***Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.*** (2 Corinthians 3:2, 3)

The Gospel is written a chapter a day
By deeds that you do and words that you say.
Men read what you say whether faithless or true.
Say, what is the Gospel according to you?

—Author unknown

That little jingle is true, by the way.

Oh, how important it is to obey the Bible! I believe that today Christianity is being hurt more by those who are church members than by any other group. That is one of the reasons that we have all

of this rebellion on the outside—rebellion against the establishment, which includes the church. A placard carried by one in a protest march had four words on it; "Church, no; Jesus, yes." Candidly, the lives of a great many in the church are turning people away from the church. There was a barrister in England years ago who was asked why he did not become a Christian. This was his answer, "I, too, might have become a Christian if I had not met so many who said they were Christians." How unfortunate that is! We need to examine our own lives in this connection. How important it is to *obey* the Word of God!

7. Pass it on to others.

Not only read the Bible, not only study the Bible, not only meditate on the Bible, and not only read what others have written about it, but pass it on to others. That is what we all should do. You will reach a saturation point in the study of the Word unless you do share it with others. God for some reason won't let you withdraw yourself from mankind and become some sort of a walking Bible encyclopedia, knowing everything, while the rest of us remain ignorant. I think that is the reason He said:

> ***Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.***
> (Hebrews 10:25)

God has told us to be witnesses. He said, "Ye shall be witnesses." He did not say that we should be scholars, walking encyclopedias, or memory books. Do not bury God's truth in a notebook. Someone has said that education is a process by which information in the professor's notebook is transferred to the student's notebook, without passing through the mind of either. Well, there is a great deal of Bible truth like that. It is not practiced, not shared. We are called to be witnesses today, therefore we ought to pass it on to others.

I learned this lesson when I was in seminary. I pastored a little church, as did five other fellows, and we found that when we were graduated, we were at least a year ahead of the other members of the class. Why? Because we were smarter than the others? No. Because we were passing it on. God was able to funnel into us a great deal more than He might have otherwise.

My friend, pass it on.

These, then, are the seven basic guidelines to follow as you take in your hands the Word of God:

1. Begin with prayer
2. Read the Bible
3. Study the Bible
4. Meditate upon the Bible
5. Read what others have written on the Bible
6. Obey the Bible
7. Pass it on to others

HOW TO STUDY YOUR BIBLE

1. Begin with prayer
   1 Corinthians 2:9-14; John 16:12-15; John 14:26
2. Read the Bible
   Nehemiah 8:1-3
3. Study the Bible
   Nehemiah 8:8
4. Meditate upon the Bible
   Deuteronomy 6:6-9; Psalm 1
5. Pass the Bible on to others
   Hebrews 5:12; Romans 12:7

HOW TO STUDY EACH CHAPTER

Locate:

1. The theme
2. The most important verse
3. The most prominent word
4. The teaching about Christ
5. The command to obey
6. The promise to claim
7. The new truth learned
   Psalm 119:18

These notes, prepared by J. Vernon McGee, are for the purpose of giving assistance to the listeners of the THRU THE BIBLE RADIO program. They are to be used with the Bible and will be more meaningful as you look up all the Scripture references.